

Congregational Churches

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Massachusetts  
Convention of Ministers

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An Historical Sketch  
Of the Convention

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Edmund Foster's

William Harrison

HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF THE  
**CONVENTION**

OF THE  
**CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS**

IN

*MASSACHUSETTS ;*

WITH

AN ACCOUNT OF ITS FUNDS ;

ITS CONNEXION WITH THE

MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CHARITABLE SOCIETY ;

AND ITS

RULES AND REGULATIONS.

MDCCCXXI.

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Printed for the Convention.

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CAMBRIDGE :  
PRINTED BY HILLIARD AND METCALF.  
1821.

IN CONVENTION 1ST OF JUNE, 1820,

THE Rev. Dr. PORTER of Roxbury, Rev. Dr. HOLMES, Rev. JOHN PIERCE, and the SCRIBE were chosen a Committee to prepare for publication and to cause to be published, in such manner as they may think proper, a concise history of this Convention, embracing some account of its origin, its objects, the state of its funds, the rules to which the members are subject, the nature of the connexion between this Convention and the Congregational Charitable Society, and such other articles of information, as, in their judgment, may be instructive and profitable.

JOHN CODMAN, *Scribe of Convention.*



## HISTORY OF THE CONVENTION.

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**O**F the origin of the CONVENTION OF CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS IN MASSACHUSETTS the notices are very imperfect. The silence of the early historians on this subject, especially of Winthrop and Hubbard, is presumptive evidence, that there was no organized Convention before the year 1680. It does appear, however, that the ministers were early accustomed to meet together at the time and place of the annual election. The patriarchal character of the government, and the intimate connexion of the church with the state, may, perhaps, account for this early usage. From the first settlement of Massachusetts, there was a confidential intercourse between the magistrates and the ministers, who mutually gave and received counsel, as the circumstances of the churches or of the community required. It was intended to settle and maintain a Christian commonwealth; and their cooperation to that great object was considered as a right and a duty. While the magistrates were expected and asked to give their advice in some cases, and to exercise their power in others, for the well founding of churches, and for preserving their order and peace; the ministers were expected and asked to give their opinions and counsel in the exigences of the state. Disputes between the principal officers, and the different branches, of the government were, at an early period, referred to the arbitration of the ministers; who were also called upon to assist in settling the principles and rules of government.

As early as the year 1634, "the ministers and other the most prudent of the inhabitants" were consulted "about a body of laws, suited to the state of the colony, and about an uniform order of discipline in the churches." When the first laws of the colony were framed, the approbation of the ministers was a condition of their validity. In 1635, Governor Winthrop observed: "The deputies having conceived great danger to our state, in regard that our magistrates, for want of positive laws, in many cases, might proceed according to their discretions, it was agreed that some men should be appointed to frame a body of grounds of laws, in resemblance of a *Magna Charta*, which, being allowed by some of the ministers and the General Court, should be received for fundamental laws." "Mr. Cotton was at first requested by the General Court with some other ministers, to assist some of the magistrates" in that work; and afterwards the General Court appointed a committee of some magistrates, some ministers and some others to perform that service: "Also the elders [ministers] who had been requested to deliver their judgment concerning the law of adultery, returned their answer with the reasons thereof." The compilation of laws was at last referred to Mr. Cotton and Mr. Nathaniel Ward, each of whom "framed a model, which, in 1639, were presented to the General Court, and by them committed to the governor and deputy and some others to consider of, and so prepare it for the court," at another session. "At length to satisfy the people it proceeded; and the two models were digested with divers alterations and additions, and abbreviated and sent to every town to be considered of, first by the magistrates and elders, and then to be published by the constables to all the people, that if any should think fit that any thing therein ought to be

altered, he might acquaint some of the deputies therewith against the next court.”\*

The early fathers of New England, with all protestant divines of their day, “allowed a power in the civil magistrate, for the preservation of the church in cases temporal, so far as belongeth to the outward preservation, not to the personal administration of them;” and held, that “the ordinary helps and external means, for the upholding and maintaining of peace and truth in the churches, in way of a civil power, is only a pious and Christian magistracy, where a nation is blessed with it, so as by the help of the ecclesiastical and the civil power, acting in a way of subordination each unto other, all differences arising may easily be composed.”† The early custom of an Election Sermon is confirmatory of these principles, and of the influence of the ministers in the state. On these occasions, the rulers were publicly and solemnly reminded of what was believed to be their duty and their right, in religious concerns. “The eye of the Civil Magistrate,” said one of the preachers, “is to be the securing of the way of God that is duly established: and if any where this be the duty and concern of rulers, it is most of all so in New England, which is originally a Plantation, not for Trade, but for Religion.”‡

We perceive, then, in the genius and character of our primitive institutions, why the ministers, from the first, would be induced to meet at the time of the sitting of the general court; but of any proceedings, in the name and character of a *Convention*, during the first half century, we have no evidence.

\* Winthrop’s Journal, 1632—1639. Hubbard’s Hist. New England, ch. xxvi, xlvi.

† Hubbard’s Hist. New England, chap. lxx. Platform, chap. xvii.

‡ President Oakes’s Election Sermon, May, 1673.

The first Sermon before the ministers in Convention, that has come to our knowledge, was preached by Rev. John Sherman of Watertown, in 1682. During the succeeding years of calamity, until the deposition of Andros, and the Revolution in England, in 1689, there is no account of Convention. Whether that Revolution, and the acts of the provincial legislature, passed soon afterwards, affecting ministers and churches, influenced the ministers to a more formal organization of a Convention, or to a more stated attendance at the annual meeting, or whatever were the cause, this appears to be the epoch of a regular Convention.

From the beginning of the government under the charter of 1692, the congregational ministers of Massachusetts "practised the holding of a convention in Boston, on the next day after the general election of counsellors."\* In Mather's *Magnalia*, 1693, there is a distinct reference to the Convention. The Rev. Mr. Hooker, towards the close of his life, had advised to the constant meetings of ministers. "According to the advice of Mr. Hooker," says Dr. Mather, "it has been the care of the ministers, in the several vicinages throughout the most part of the country, to establish *constant meetings*, whereat they have informed one another of their various exercises, and assisted one another in the work of our Lord: besides a general appearance of all the ministers in each colony, once a year, at the *town*, and the *time* of the General Court for Elections of Magistrates in the colonies."† In a later work of the same author the Convention is expressly mentioned, with the time of its meeting, its leading objects, and the custom of an annual Sermon: "How often Provincial Synods were held in Firmilian's time, is evident from that

\* Appendix to Dr. Thacher's Sermon before the Massachusetts Congregational Charitable Society.

† *Magnalia*, Book v. p. 58.

Report of his, *Per singulos annos in unum conveniunt*. The churches of New England can have no such thing reported of them. They have no provincial synods, and their occasional synods, on special emergencies, and of smaller dimensions, are but as the occasions happen for them. The thing among them that is the nearest thereunto, is a *General Convention* of ministers (which, perhaps, are not above half) belonging to the Province, at the time of the Anniversary Solemnity, when the General Assembly of the Province meets, on the last Wednesday in the month of May, to elect their Counsellors for the year ensuing. Then the Ministers, chusing a Moderator, do propose matters of public importance, referring to the interest of Religion in the churches; and though they assume no *decisive* power, yet the advice which they give to the people of God has proved of great use unto the country. There is now taken up the custom for (*Concio ad Clerum*,) a Sermon to be preached unto the Convention of Ministers, on the day after the Election, by one of their number, chosen to it by their votes, at their meeting in the preceding year. At this Convention, every pastor, that meets with singular difficulties, has opportunity to bring them under consideration. But the question most usually now considered, is of this importance, *What may be further proposed, for the preserving and promoting of true piety in the land?* Excellent things have been here concerted and concluded for the propagation of religion, and collections produced for that purpose in all the churches. And motions have been hence made unto the General Assembly, for such Acts and Laws as the morals of the people have called for.”\* The Governor of the Province, and such

\* *Ratio Disciplinæ Fratrum Nov-Anglorum*: “A Faithful Account of the Discipline professed and practised in the Churches of New England,” 1726.

counsellors as lived in Boston, together with the representatives of the town, and the Speaker, were invited to dine with the ministers on the day after the Election—"some small resemblance," says Dr. Mather, "of what is called *The Feast of Moses and Aaron*, in the Netherlands."

The Convention has been accustomed to address the civil rulers, and to use its influence for the encouragement of learning, and the conservation of the public liberties. It has presented addresses to the King, to the Governors, to the Provincial Congress, and to the President of the United States; and memorials to the Congress of the United States. After addressing the late king at his accession, the Convention voted thanks to governor Bernard "for the kind care he was pleased to take of their address to his Majesty; as also, for the regard which he has shown to the interest of learning in the Province—and humbly to desire the continuance of his Excellency's favour to Harvard College in Cambridge."

The Convention has maintained a friendly and Christian correspondence with other associated ministers, of the Protestant Reformed churches, at home and abroad. In 1750, "the Convention being sensible of the great importance of cultivating a stricter union with our brethren of the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations in England, and particularly their deputation at London," voted to choose annually a committee in their behalf, "to manage and cultivate said union and correspondences, and annually report their proceedings to the Convention, and receive their directions from time to time." On the reception of a letter from delegates from the Associated pastors in Connecticut and a committee of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, inviting them to join with them in a proposed convention at New Haven in 1767, the Convention voted: "That although we are not pre-

pared to send delegates to the proposed Convention, yet we take this occasion to declare our sincere affection to our brethren, and our fellowship with them in the gospel, and our readiness to unite our counsels and endeavours with them for the spreading of the Gospel, and defending the religious liberties of these Churches; for cultivating love and harmony among ourselves and with our friends abroad, and for promoting the kingdom of our common Redeemer." A committee of correspondence was chosen; and instructed also, to write to the committee of deputation of Dissenters in England, "to thank them for the concern they have expressed for our Religious Liberties; and to desire that they would give us their assistance, and use their influence for the preservation of the same, and, in particular, that a bishop may not be sent among us." In 1668, the thanks of Convention were voted to Rev. Dr. Chauncy, "for his just and seasonable Remarks on a late Sermon of the bishop of Landaff, preached before the Society for propagating the Gospel; as also for his learned and judicious Reply to Dr. Chandler's Appeal in favour of an American Episcopate;" and, in 1770, "for his learned and judicious Reply to Dr. Chandler's Vindication of his Appeal."

In 1771, the Convention chose a committee, "to maintain a correspondence with our brethren in the Southern Governments; and, in 1792, a committee, to consider the proposal of forming a correspondence with the General Presbytery of the Southern States, and General Association of Congregational Ministers in Connecticut." In 1793, a committee of correspondence was chosen, with instructions to write to those two bodies, "proposing to them not to receive or countenance any candidate from us, who does not bring credentials from a regular body among us known to them, and assuring them that we will

observe the same rule with respect to candidates from them; and informing them that we shall be glad to hear from them upon all subjects which relate to the interests of our common Christianity, and to communicate every information upon such subjects as may tend to promote the interests of Religion.”

The Convention has occasionally called the attention of ministers and churches to the principles of their Platform, and given cautions and admonitions against prevalent errors. In 1702, it published “A Seasonable Testimony to the glorious doctrines of grace, at this day many ways undermined in the world.” In 1704, “to serve the great intentions of religion, lamentably decaying in the country,” it was proposed by Convention: “That the pastors of the churches personally discourse with the young people in their flocks, and with all possible prudence and goodness endeavour to win their consent to the Covenant of grace; that, to this end, they adopt the practice of making their personal visits to all the families that belong to their Congregations;” that, as far as practicable, they thus induce their people “publicly and solemnly to recognise the Covenant of God, and come into such a degree of the Church state, as they shall be willing to take their station in, but not to leave off, till they shall be qualified for, and persuaded to, communion with the Church in *all* special ordinances; that for such as have submitted to the government of Christ in any of his churches, no pastors of any other churches, any way go to shelter them under their wing, from the discipline of those from whom they have not been fairly recommended; that they who have not actually recognised their subjection to the *discipline* of Christ in his church, yet should, either upon their obstinate refusal of such a subjection, or their falling into other scandals, be faithfully treated with proper admoni-



tions—about the method of managing which, the pastors with their several churches will be left to the exercise of their own discretion.” The desire and intention were also expressed, “That at the General Convention of Ministers, there may be given in an account of their success” in the proposed undertaking; “that the Lord may have the glory of his grace, and the condition of religion may be better known and served among us.” In subserviency to these intentions, it was proposed, “That the Associations of the ministers in the several parts of the country may be strengthened; and that they may hold more free communications with one another.”\* In 1756, on receiving a letter with papers from a number of aggrieved brethren of a Church, relating to the installation of a minister, the Convention voted it as their opinion, “that all such proceedings as these are represented to be, are very irregular, against which they think themselves obliged to bear their testimony, as having a manifest tendency to destroy these churches, if not seasonably discountenanced.” In 1757, it was “recommended by the Convention to the ministers and people throughout the Province, to give themselves to more solemn and devout prayer, and reformation of manners, in this very important crisis of our public affairs.” The same year, the Convention directed a letter to be written to a distant people, that had received their charities, “expostulating with them upon their doing so little towards the support of the gospel, and ordinances of religion among them; and representing to them, that if they persist in such a conduct, the Convention must withdraw the large assistance they have so long afforded them for this purpose.” In 1773, it was voted, that the state of the churches in this Province, with respect to church order and discipline, is such as to require the attention of this Convention. A committee was chosen, to make dili-

\* *Ratio Disciplinæ*, 177—179.

gent inquiry into the sense and meaning of the Platform of Church Discipline, and the general practice of our Fathers and of the Churches in this land from their days, with respect to church order. The Report of this committee was directed to be printed and published.

Before the institution of Bible Societies, which have so wonderfully contributed to the diffusion of the holy Scriptures in our time, the Convention paid particular attention to this most important subject. On receiving an Address from the North Association in Hampshire county, in 1782, representing the great want of Bibles in that part of the country, and praying the Convention to use their influence by petitioning the General Court to grant assistance and encouragement for printing the Bible in this country; and several similar representations from other parts of the country; the Convention chose a committee, to take the subject under serious consideration, and use such means as should to them appear most promising, "to put it in the power of those who are destitute of Bibles, to purchase them in the most cheap and expeditious manner."

An Address, in 1789, from the Association of ministers in and about Cambridge, relative to licensing, encouraging, or employing candidates for the ministry, induced the printing and publishing of "A Recommendation from the Convention of the Congregational Ministers at Boston, May 26, 1790." After a preamble, stating the grounds of the recommendation, the Convention,

1. Recommend it to all young gentlemen, who design to devote themselves to the work of the ministry, to spend that portion of time in the study of divinity, previously to appearing in the pulpit, which improved and judicious advisers shall think necessary to qualify them for public teachers.

2. They earnestly recommend it to Congregational Ministers and People, not to encourage or employ any

one as a candidate for the ministry, except he show by written testimonials, that he has been carefully examined respecting his acquaintance with the principles of natural and revealed religion, and other things necessary to qualify him for the work of the ministry; and that he is properly recommended to it, as a man of knowledge and good character, by some regular Congregational Association or Presbytery.

3. To ministers not associated, they suggest the importance of their commencing members of regular Associations, as soon as opportunity present; for, say they, “we are all members of the same body, and are called by the Gospel of Christ to cooperate with each other, in promoting the interest of a learned, judicious and religious ministry.”

In 1799, the Convention unanimously voted an Address to their brethren of the respective Associations, and the unassociated ministers in this Commonwealth, “recommending to them seriously to consider the alarming prevalence of infidelity and immorality; and exhorting them to vigilance and activity in their several stations, in resisting the progress of those principles, and reviving and promoting the spirit of true Christianity, by those means which they may think most expedient.”

In 1802, the Convention published an Address, expressing their sentiments “on the propriety and importance of using the Scriptures in Schools; calling the attention of their brethren, of the people at large, and especially of those who are by law appointed the visitors of our schools, to this interesting subject.”

In 1804, a motion was made in Convention, to address the Associations of Congregational Ministers on the subject of forming a Convention “for the purpose of agreeing upon a plan of friendly ministerial union, and for estab-

lishing a General Association. "The Convention chose a committee to consider and report upon the Proposition; instructing them to transmit it to the several Associations of Congregational Ministers in the Commonwealth, requesting them to take the subject into their serious consideration, and to offer their sentiments upon it to Convention through their committee previously to the meeting of the Convention in May, 1805." At that meeting, the committee reported the returns they had received; and, on the whole, concluded their Report in favour of the Proposition. After a discussion of the Report, and mature deliberation, the question of acceptance was determined in the negative.

On certain questions relating to church order, proposed to the Convention by an Association in 1813, the Convention, learning "that a particular case exists, which gave rise to the questions, and to which the opinion of Convention, if pronounced, would in all probability be applied," declined giving a distinct answer; but earnestly recommended, "that, in any case of difficulty existing between churches, means should be employed in the proper ecclesiastical way, and with the spirit of Christian meekness and charity, to bring it to an amicable adjustment, or a regular decision."

Where the Convention was accustomed to assemble, in early times, does not appear. After the American revolution, the meetings were held in the old Courthouse, until the erection of the new one; since which time the Convention has been indulged with the use of that convenient edifice for its annual meetings. About a century since, as we learn from Dr. Mather, a dinner was generously provided for the Convention by the deacons of the united churches in Boston; and the governor and principal gentlemen in the government were invited with the

ministers on that occasion. How long this usage continued is not known. In 1769, the Convention voted thanks to Dr. Sewall, then in the decline of life, “for his kindness and hospitality in accommodating the Convention for so many years at his house.” For several years, the ministers of Boston were accustomed to invite the members of Convention to dine at their tables. In 1806, a dinner was provided by a subscription of sundry gentlemen in Boston; and the surplus of the money, thus generously subscribed, was to be given to the Congregational Charitable Society. The thanks of the Convention were voted to those gentlemen for their attention and liberality—which have since been often experienced. More recently, the congregational societies in Boston have provided a liberal entertainment for the Convention, under direction of the deacons of their churches; of which a grateful sense has been testified by their votes.

### *Objects of Convention.*

FROM the transactions of the Convention it appears, that its design has been, to promote brotherly love and religious improvement; to give advice to ministers in difficult cases; to consider the best means for preserving and promoting piety; to concert measures for the propagation of religion, and to promote collections for that purpose; to act in concert, as far as suitable to the ministerial character, in all matters of general concern, respecting the interests of religion, and the order, peace, liberties, and prosperity of the Congregational Churches; to hold correspondences with other associated pastors and churches, relative to the interests of the church and of religion; to aid poor parishes in supporting their ministers; to assist indigent ministers, their widows and orphan children; to provide

funds for the relief of widows and orphans of ministers, and direct the distribution of this charity; to bear testimony against prevailing errors in doctrine, discipline, or manners; to remonstrate to delinquent churches and people concerning neglect to support the gospel; and to recommend whatever may be of general use to ministers and churches, or to the commonwealth and country. It also appears, that the proceedings, relative to objects and persons external to the Convention, have always been by way of counsel, recommendation, advice, or congratulation; and not on the ground of assumed or delegated authority.

*Origin and state of the Fund.*

THE Convention appears to have kept no records until 1748. It was then voted, at the annual meeting, to have a blank Book, in which should be entered the minutes of the Convention, with the votes and accounts. Minutes, it is evident, had been previously kept; for, at the same meeting, "the minutes of the transactions of the last Convention were read." The collections, too, it appears, had already been such as to require a treasurer; for the accounts of the last year were presented and accepted; the thanks of Convention were given to Dr. Sewall, the treasurer, for his care and fidelity; and he was requested to continue in the office the ensuing year. By an application from a society in Rhode Island, requesting "assistance towards the maintenance of a minister," and by other evidences, it appears, that the Convention had already "dispersed abroad" its alms. A measure was now adopted for the establishment of a Fund. It was voted, "that the Convention recommend it to the ministers through the Province, that they endeavour that there may

be a Collection in their several Congregations towards a Fund for the propagation of the Christian religion.”

The monies, collected by the Convention, appear to have been distributed among indigent ministers until the year 1762. A question was then proposed, “Whether the Convention will choose a committee to consider what may be done to render their annual contribution more extensively useful and beneficial; and in order hereto, whether a part of it should be applied to the use of ministers’ widows and children, who might need the same, as well as to indigent ministers.” It was voted in the affirmative; and a committee was accordingly chosen.

Of the Collection that year, four pounds ten shillings were appropriated to the proposed Fund for ministers’ widows and children. This was the commencement of the Convention’s Fund.\*

At the annual meeting, 30 May, 1765, the Convention voted, that the unappropriated part of the Collection this day be added to the sum already in the treasury, to lie as a Fund towards the support of ministers’ widows and children that are indigent, agreeable to some plan that may hereafter be agreed upon by the Convention; and a committee was chosen to prepare and offer a plan accord-

* The Collection was	270 <i>l.</i>	6 <i>s.</i>	3 <i>d.</i>	(old tenor.)	<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Of which, appropriated to 6 ministers	. . .	80	4	0			
“ “ to 1 widow	. . . . .	3	17	6			
“ “ to poor ministers’ widows	. . . . .	2	5	0			
“ “ to proposed Fund	. . . . .	4	10	0			
					<hr/>		
		90	16	6			

Of the unappropriated money were voted,

To Providence, to support preaching	. . . . .	50	0	0
Rev. O. Campbell, (Tiverton)	. . . . .	79	9	9
Rev. Mr. Torry, (S. Kingston)	. . . . .	50	0	0
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		179	9	9

ingly. In 1766, the committee not reporting a plan, another committee was chosen to prosecute the design; and a vote was passed, "That the money already in hand, and what may this year be devoted for a Fund for the relief of poor ministers' widows and children, be put into the hands of the Rev. Dr. Sewall, Dr. Chauncy, and Mr. Cooper, to be by them improved at interest for the use aforesaid." A committee was thus appointed annually, to act as trustees, until the incorporation of a Society for the care and management of the Fund.

In this "day of small things," a valuable legacy was bequeathed to the benevolent object, which had long been occupying the thoughts and care of the Convention. Mr. JUDAH MONIS, a Jew by birth, who had embraced the Christian religion and been baptized at Cambridge, where he lived many years as a Hebrew instructor, died in 1764, leaving most of his estate to this pious charity. How it was to be managed and applied, appears by the Will: "I also will that all my real estate be sold by my Executors .....and that the proceeds of such sale be deposited in the hands of the Rev. Messrs. Nathaniel Appleton, minister of the first Parish in Cambridge, Ebenezer Gay of Hingham, minister of the first Parish there, John Martin minister of the second Parish in Westborough [now Northborough], Andrew Eliot of Boston, minister of a Church of Christ there, and Thomas Barnard of Salem, minister of a Church of Christ there, or their respective successors in said office, for the relief of the poor widows of the ministers of Christ in the Province.....in this form, namely, the principal sum to be let out on lawful interest by the said ministers, and their said successors in the office aforesaid forever, and the interest thereof distributed by them or the major part of them, as they, with the advice of the Convention of the Ministers of the Congregational persuasion,



at their Anniversary Meeting, shall judge proper forever." Mr. Monis also gave, for the same purpose, such part of his personal estate, as should not, after his decease, be found disposed of to other persons or uses. On the settlement of the estate, the sum ordered by the Judge of Probate to be paid to the Trustees, 23 May, 1766, was one hundred and eleven pounds, sixteen shillings, and eight pence.\* The Convention, thus encouraged to pursue their object, voted, that year, "That the sum of one hundred pounds of the unappropriated money, collected this day, be added to the sum already collected towards a Fund for the relief of Indigent Widows and poor orphan Children of Ministers, to be improved at interest, agreeable to a vote of the Convention passed this day."†

In 1767, the committee, chosen to prepare and offer a plan for a Fund, reported, that the Convention empower a number from themselves to apply in their name to the General Court for an act of incorporation, "in order to the more effectual management of the Fund to be raised for the relief of their Widows and orphan Children;" pointed out means to raise this Fund, and to direct as to its application; and recommended, "as it will be some

\* The MONIS FUND is now \$400; the interest of which the Trustees annually divide among four widows, with the concurrence of Convention, to which they make an annual Report.

† On the Record of this year is entered the following "Account of the several sums already devoted to the proposed Fund for the relief of the Widows and orphan Children of poor Ministers."

	<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Appropriated in the Collection, May 27, 1762	6	15	0 (old tenor)
"                    "          May 26, 1763	48	8	5
"                    "          May 29, 1765	4	15	0
Voted the whole unapprop. coll. May 29, 1765	211	1	4
Appropriated in the Collection May 29, 1766	4	19	0
Voted of the unapprop. coll.    May 29, 1766	100	0	0
	<hr/>		
	375	18	9

time before a corporation can be constituted and the constitution receive the royal assent, that, in the mean time, the money collected at the annual Convention, except what may be appropriated, be put into the hands of a number of the Convention to be by them, as Trustees, put out at interest, and that the interest be disposed of annually, by the Convention, on the forenoon preceding the public Exercises and Collection, to such Widows and orphan Children of Ministers of the Massachusetts Province, as they shall think fit." The Convention accepted the Report, and voted, "that it be forthwith carried into execution." A vote was also passed, That the proposed Incorporate Society do consist of an equal number of ministers and of lay-gentlemen; and that the whole number should be thirty. Fifteen laymen, of distinguished character in the state, and the same number of ministers, were then "nominated and voted to be first members of the proposed Incorporate Society." At the head of the former appears the name of "His Honour Thomas Hutchinson, Lieut. Governour." The commotions, soon after excited in the Province by the Stamp Act; the dissatisfaction with the gubernatorial administration; and the revolutionary war, which convulsed the country, and put "all the foundations out of course," sufficiently account for a delay of the execution of the plan of Convention for several years. After the successful termination of a long war, and the tranquil settlement of the commonwealth as an Independent State, the plan was auspiciously resumed.

In the mean time, the Fund of the Convention received a considerable addition from the estate of the Hon. JOHN ALFORD, Esq. of Charlestown, lately deceased, who had given a discretionary power to his Executors for appropriations to certain charitable and literary objects. At a meeting of the Convention in 1775, a letter was com-

municated from Richard Cary, Esq. informing the Convention, that the Executors had agreed to give fifty pounds sterling to the Fund for the relief of the Widows and orphan Children of poor Ministers out of the estate of Col. Alford. It was stated, at the same time, that this sum had been received by the Treasurer of the Convention. The particular acknowledgments and thanks of the Convention were presented to the Executors of the Will of Col. Alford, “for this kind and liberal donation, wherein they have not only evidenced a generous pity to a distressed and very helpless part of the community, but have discovered a friendly regard to the Ministry of this Province.” The Convention embraced this opportunity “to testify their grateful sense of the noble benevolence of the Honourable and worthy Testator; and to express their pleasing expectation, that his munificent bequest, so wisely distributed, by his Executors, to this and other extensively useful institutions, will serve to transmit the memory of Col. Alford with honour to the latest posterity.”

In 1783, the Convention voted, That the Trustees now living be desired to continue; and chose a committee “to prepare a plan for a Fund to be established in this Commonwealth for the relief of the Widows and orphan Children of poor Ministers, and for other purposes which may be mentioned in said plan;” and to lay the plan before the General Court of this Commonwealth, and to use their influence to obtain a Charter. In 1784, the committee reported a plan, and the form of a Bill for an Act of Incorporation; and after some emendation, a committee was chosen, to fill up the blanks, and perfect the Bill for a Society to be incorporated, and, when completed, to use their best endeavours to obtain a Charter of the General Court. In 1785, the Convention voted to renew their application to the General Court for the same purpose.

*Connexion between the Convention and the Congregational Charitable Society.*

AN Act of Incorporation was at length obtained. At the annual meeting of the Convention in 1786, a committee on the subject made report; and the act was read. It was passed 24 March, 1786, and was signed, as approved, by governor BOWDOIN. The preamble states its origin and object: "Whereas a number of congregational ministers within this Commonwealth have petitioned, and it appears to the General Court expedient, that a number of persons be incorporated into a Society for the humane and benevolent purposes of affording relief and support to the widows and children of deceased ministers and other persons therein mentioned: *Be it therefore enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court,*" &c. The names of twenty persons are inserted in the Act; ten of whom were laymen, and ten ministers. The Act incorporates them into a Society by the name of THE MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CHARITABLE SOCIETY; and ordains, "that they and such others as shall be duly elected into the said corporation, shall be and remain a body politic and corporate, by the same name, style and title forever." One article of the Act requires, that all grants, donations, devises and bequests, made to the Society, shall be used and improved to the best advantage; and that the annual income shall be applied to the support of such widows and children of deceased congregational ministers, as have been or shall be settled within this Commonwealth, and of widows and children of the president and professors of the University in Cambridge, as, in the opinion of said corporation, shall be proper objects of the said charity." The Act requires the Society to meet some time in the month of May annually; and gives

power to elect by ballot any other person or persons as members of it: "Provided always, that the said Society shall not at any time consist of more than thirty members; provided, also, that the same proportion be observed in the said elections, between the clergy and the laity, which is observed in this act." A meeting was called and holden in the Senate chamber in Boston, 24 May, 1786, and the Society was organized by the choice and qualification of the several officers named in the Act of Incorporation.

After the reading of the Act in Convention, a committee was chosen to confer with a committee of the Society, on such measures as should appear to be most conducive to the purposes of the institution; and the next morning, the committee made the following Report:

"It appears to your Committee, that the Society, lately incorporated by the name of THE MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CHARITABLE SOCIETY, is so constituted as to answer the general purposes for which Convention has so long wished to have a Society incorporated; and your Committee think it advisable, that Convention order the Treasurer to deliver such monies as he may now have, belonging to Convention, into the hands of the Treasurer of said Society, by some vote of the following kind:

"Whereas there is now in the Treasury of Convention the sum of five hundred and seventy one pounds one shilling and seven pence, in public and private securities, which sum has been given by divers persons, the interest of which is to be used for the benefit of the poor widows and orphans of deceased Ministers, which monies the Convention wish to have in the hands of a legal Trust; Therefore,

"Voted, That the Treasurer of the Convention be directed to put the above mentioned securities and what

other property he may have belonging to the Convention, into the hands of the Treasurer of the Massachusetts Congregational Charitable Society, to be improved by said Society in such ways as, in their wisdom, they shall judge most conducive to the benevolent purposes of the Donors; the interest of which securities, and such other property, as the Convention may put into the hands of said Society, to be distributed from time to time, agreeably to the advice of the Convention." The Report was accepted.

The Convention, accordingly, transferred to the Society, in trust, *571l. 1s. 7d.* From that time to the present, the funds of Convention have been held and improved in the same manner as the Society's stock; and an annual account is rendered to the Convention of their exact state.\*

In reference to the Incorporation of the Society, it has been observed: "This indulgence of our government to the clergy, and the respect so universally paid to religious institutions by the rulers of our state, will continue the encouragement to men of literary talents to settle as ministers; and will give ease to the pained hearts of many, who, after spending the prime of their life in labours to promote the happiness of others, are leaving widows and orphans on the arms of public charity. The act by which this Society is established, independent of pecuniary considerations, has an unfailing influence to render the office of a minister respectable. It is the Commonwealth's smile of approbation upon the office, and will render to

\* In 1820, the Fund of Convention, before its appro-

priations, was	-	-	-	-	-	-	§5824 83
Appropriated	-	-	-	-	-	-	300 00
							<hr/>
						Amount of the Fund	§5524 83

the clergy a substantial support in the important duties of it. Perhaps there never was an institution, which was pointed more directly to proper objects of charity, or in the execution of which, the principles of true benevolence could be exerted in a manner more productive of the general good of the country.”\*

The Convention has, of late years, added to the Annual Collection, after the Convention Sermon, for immediate distribution, \$300; and the Contribution at the Annual Collection has been from 300 to 600 dollars. The Massachusetts Congregational Charitable Society have, of late, annually voted \$200, to be added to the Collection; and this is distributed by vote of the Convention among a number of widows of deceased ministers. The Society have given, besides, a considerable sum, annually, to those objects of their bounty, whose circumstances were peculiarly necessitous.† “But they have felt it a duty, in the management of their funds, to endeavour to add something to the capital, by reserving annually a portion of the interest; so that in time, it may be hoped, the proceeds may be more adequate than heretofore to the applications continually urged for help and relief. They acknowledge, with pleasure, the liberality of many; and doubt not the continued benefactions of

\* “History of the Society,” in an Appendix to Dr. Thacher’s Sermon in 1795, “By a member who is not a minister.” It is ascribed to the late governor Sullivan.

† In 1820, the Congregational Charitable Society voted,

To be added to the Collection	- - -	\$200
“ given to indigent widows	- - -	1000
The SOCIETY has paid from its own Funds,		
(Total amount) To widows and orphans	- - -	3875
“ To Convention	- - -	2150
“ From Fund of CONVENTION (per order)		3269.31.

the friends of religion, to a charity so important and interesting.”\*

The Convention embraced all the congregational ministers in the Commonwealth, including the District of Maine, until the formation of Maine into a separate State, in 1820. A committee, chosen the last year by Convention, “to take into consideration the subject of the appropriations of the charity of Convention to widows in Maine,” have been officially informed, that a similar Convention has been organized in Maine, since the separation. “A majority of the Associations were in favour of such a measure. Of this public notice was given, and a meeting of congregational ministers requested. On the 18th of January a respectable number of them assembled and formed themselves into a Convention on the same broad basis, on which the Convention in Massachusetts is established.” A correspondence and conference have been held with the officers of that Convention, and a satisfactory arrangement, in relation to the Fund, is expected to be made at the

\* “Account of the Mass. Cong. Charitable Society,” 1815.

Beside numerous other less, but valuable donations, the Society have recorded the following :

John Winslow, Esq. of Dunstable, “towards a perpetual fund”	- - - - -	£200 = \$666.66
Hon. Thomas Russell	- - - - -	200 = 666.66
Jonathan Mason, Esq.	- - - - -	200
Joseph Barrell, Esq.	- - - - -	400
Miss Anna Cabot Lowell, beside \$5000, in trust, for this and other purposes	- - - - -	1000
Hon. Samuel Dexter, (Sen.)	- - - - -	200
John Derby, Esq. a legacy	- - - - -	1000
Subscriptions procured by Samuel Eliot, Esq. upwards of	- - - - -	4000
Mrs. Lowell, widow of the late Judge Lowell	- - - - -	2400
Hon. Peter C. Brooks	- - - - -	200
Samuel Eliot, Esq. a legacy	- - - - -	3000
Joseph Coolidge, Esq. a legacy	- - - - -	500



next annual meeting of the Massachusetts Convention. The remembrance of our brethren will not be obliterated, nor our sympathies with their widows and orphan children extinguished, by a political division of the Commonwealth. What should be the measure of our charity, upon this change of relations, is for the Convention to determine.

### *Rules and Regulations of Convention.*

I. THE Convention is opened on the day of the General Election, at 5 o'clock, P. M. ; and on the following day, at 11 o'clock, A. M. a Sermon is delivered in public before the Convention, and a Collection made for the indigent Widows of congregational ministers.

II. Every ordained Congregational Minister, having the care of a particular church within this Commonwealth shall be considered as a member of this Convention ; the Presidents and Professors in the Theological departments in any public seminary in this Commonwealth may be admitted by special vote, and no others shall be eligible : yet, congregational ministers, dismissed from their pastoral relation with good recommendations, and continuing to preach, as candidates for settlement, may be honorary members, and have the privilege of sitting and deliberating in the Convention, but not of voting.

III. The person who preaches the annual Convention Sermon shall be considered as Moderator of Convention for that year.

IV. When any person has any subject or question to propose to Convention for their consideration, he shall give it in, before the Convention proceeds to business, to the Scribe of Convention, to be by him put on the list of articles to be acted on by Convention, which list shall be

read before business commences; or, if he be prevented from doing this by necessity, he shall deliver it, stated on paper, to the Scribe, who shall read it to the Convention, that it may be at their disposal; and no person shall be allowed to speak more than twice on the same subject, except by leave of Convention.

V. A Standing Committee of thirty shall be appointed, five of whom shall be chosen centrally, and the remainder in different parts of the State. The five shall act as a Reporting Committee, to receive from the other members of the Committee applications and statements of facts in behalf of persons who may be subjects of the charity of the Convention, and having considered the same, shall judge of the persons to be relieved, and the proportion to be given to each, and make report to Convention on the first day of their meeting, annually.

VI. The indigent widows of congregational ministers, and their orphan children *under age*, are the proper objects of the charities of Convention.

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WHEN the widow of any congregational minister is considered an object of the charity of the Convention, it is desired, that, by *the first of May* in each year, answers may be given, by one of the Standing Committee to the Reporting Committee, to the following questions:

1. What is her age?
2. What are the number, the sex, the ages, and the circumstances of her children?
3. What is a fair estimate of her property?
4. What is her ability to help herself?
5. What connexions has she, who are bound to afford her assistance? And in what way do they assist her?

6. What is her income ?

7. What peculiar circumstances render her an object of charity ; or make it desirable, that she should have aid this year ?

The Standing Committee are also desired to give notice to the Scribe, whenever an alteration takes place in the circumstances of the widows, who are objects of charity.

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#### TREASURERS OF THE CONVENTION.

Rev. Joseph Sewall,  
 Ebenezer Pemberton,  
 Andrew Eliot,  
 William Gordon,  
 Simeon Howard,  
 Oliver Everett,  
 Joseph Eckley,  
 John Eliot,  
 William E. Channing,  
 Charles Lowell,  
 Francis Parkman.

PREACHERS OF THE CONVENTION SERMON.

<i>By whom.</i>	<i>Of what place.</i>	<i>Text.</i>
A. D. Rev.		
1682 John Sherman,	Watertown.	
1722 * †Cotton Mather,	Boston.	Rev. ii. 19.
1723 †Nehemiah Walter,	Roxbury.	1 Tim. i. 12.
1724 †Peter Thacher,	Milton.	Phil. i. 21. (MS.)
1726 †William Williams,	Hatfield.	Col. iv. 11.
1728 John Williams,	Deerfield.	
1738 John Barnard,	Marblehead.	Col. i. 18.
1739 Nathaniel Eelles,	Scituate	1 Sam. iv. 13.
1740 Thomas Prince,	Boston.	Isai. ix. 7.
1741 †Edward Holyoke,	Pres. of H. Coll.	Matth. xvi. 6.
1742 Israel Loring,	Sudbury.	
1743 †Nathaniel Appleton,	Cambridge.	Matth. v. 13, 14.
1744 †Charles Chauncy, D. D.	Boston.	Titus ii. 15.
1745 †Peter Clark,	Salem Village.	Romans iii. 1, 2.
1746 †Ebenezer Gay,	Hingham.	John i. 32.
1748 Edward Wigglesworth, D.D.	S. T. P. Harv. Coll.	
1749 John Barnard,	Andover.	2 Corinth. iv. 1.
1750 William Welsteed,	Boston.	1 Tim. iv. 6.
1751 Samuel Wigglesworth,	Ipswich.	2 Corinth. xi. 2.
1753 †Samuel Phillips,	Andover.	Acts x. 36.
1754 Stephen Williams,	Springfield.	Exodus xxv. 8.
1755 Joseph Parsons,	Bradford.	Matth. v. 14, 15, 16.
1756 Hull Abbot,	Charlestown.	
1757 †William Rand,	Kingstown.	1 Thess. ii. 4.
1758 †Jonathan Townsend,	Needham.	1 John, 8.
1759 Ebenezer Pemberton,	Boston.	Rom. xi. 13.
1760 William Balch,	Bradford.	2 Corinth. i. 12.
1761 †Ebenezer Parkman,	Westborough.	2 Corinth. v. 14.
1762 Samuel Mather,	Boston.	2 Corinth. xi. 28.
1763 John Lowell,	Newburyport.	2 Corinth. vii. 2.
1765 Charles Chauncy, D.D.	Boston.	Acts viii. 5.
1766 Thomas Prentice,	Charlestown.	1 Corinth. xiv. 1.
1767 Andrew Eliot, D.D.	Boston.	James v. 19, 20.
1768 †John Tucker,	Newbury.	Col. iv. 11.
1769 Samuel Dunbar,	Stoughton.	Gal. i. 8, 9.
1770 Samuel Cooper, D.D.	Boston.	Rev. xii. 1.
1771 Robert Breck,	Springfield.	Heb. xiii. 1.

\* Dr. Cotton Mather's Sermon, in 1689, has been erroneously supposed to have been delivered before the Convention of Ministers. It was "preached to the Convention of the Colony."

† The Sermons with this mark † are in the Library of the Massachusetts Historical Society. A complete series of them would be highly valued by a Society, whose objects are, "the collection and preservation, for the use of the public and posterity, of all documents relating to the history and antiquities, ecclesiastical, civil, and natural, of our country."

1772 †Samuel Locke, D. D.	Pres. of H. Coll.	2 Corinth. iv. 2.
1773 †Edward Barnard,	Haverhill.	John iv. 36, 37, 38.
1774 James Chandler,	Rowley.	2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.
1775 Benjamin Stevens,	Kittery.	Matth. xxiv. 45, 46.
1776 Samuel Cooke,	Cambridge.	1 Thess. ii. 4.
1777 Samuel Langdon, D.D.	Pres. of H. Coll.	Gal. i. 11, 12.
1778 Isaac Morrill,	Wilmington.	Dan. xii. 3.
1779 Samuel Webster,	Salisbury.	Matth. vii. 23, 29.
1780 Ebenezer Bridge,	Chelmsford.	
1781 John Mellen,	Hanover.	
1782 Thaddeus Maccarty,	Worcester.	
1783 Daniel Shute,	Hingham.	
1784 Joseph Willard,	Pres. of H. Coll.	
1785 Phillips Payson,	Chelsea.	
1786 Moses Hemmenway,	Wells.	
1787 Gad Hitchcock,	Pembroke.	
1788 Nathan Fiske,	Brookfield.	
1789 Jacob Cushing,	Waltham.	Acts ii. 42.
1790 Simeon Howard, D.D.	Boston.	
1791 Jason Haven,	Dedham.	
1792 Josiah Bridge,	Sudbury.	1 Thess. ii. 4.
1793 Thomas Barnard,	Salem.	Ecccl. iii. 1.
1794 Chandler Robbins, D.D.	Plymouth.	Acts xx. 26.
1795 Henry Cumings, D.D.	Billerica.	Rom. xi. 13.
1796 †Jeremy Belknap, D.D.	Boston.	2 Tim. i. 8.
1797 †David Tappan, D.D.	S. T. P. Har. Coll.	Exod. xxviii. 36, 38.
1798 †David Osgood, D.D.	Medford.	Matth. xiii. 53.
1799 †Eli Forbes,	Gloucester.	2 Corinth. vi. 3, 4.
1800 John Lathrop, D.D.	Boston.	
1801 †Joseph Dana, D.D.	Ipswich.	Rom. i. 16.
1802 Peter Thacher, D.D.	Boston.	Rom. i. 9.
1803 Thomas Prentiss,	Medfield.	Luke xiv. 23.
1804 Nathanael Emmons,	Franklin.	1 Corinth. i. 10.
1805 Zedekiah Sanger,	Bridgewater.	Isaiah i. 18.
1806 †Joseph Lyman, D.D.	Hathfield.	1 Corinth. xi. 1.
1807 †John Reed, D.D.	Bridgewater.	Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10.
1808 Daniel Chaplin,	Groton.	Mal. ii. 7.
1809 Samuel Spring, D.D.	Newburyport.	1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.
1810 †Eliphalet Porter, D.D.	Roxbury.	2 Corinth. xi. 3.
1811 †Reuben Puffer, D.D.	Berlin.	Coloss. iv. 11.
1812 Jedidiah Morse, D.D.	Charlestown.	1 Tim. i. 5.
1813 John T. Kirkland, D.D.	Pres. of H. Coll.	Tit. ii. 11, 14.
1814 Jesse Appleton, D.D.	Pres. of B. Coll.	2 Tim. i. 10.
1815 Charles Stearns, D.D.	Lincoln.	John xiii. 13.
1816 William E. Channing,	Boston.	Isai. ii. 4.
1817 Alvan Hyde, D.D.	Lee.	2 Pet. ii. 1.
1818 Henry Ware, D.D.	S. T. P. Har. Coll.	John xx. 31.
1819 †Abiel Holmes, D.D.	Cambridge.	Titus i. 7.
1820 Aaron Bancroft, D.D.	Worcester.	Philipp. i. 17.

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From an inspection of the subjects it is evident, that the Discourse has always been considered, not as a mere Charity Sermon, but a *Concio ad Clerum*.

## SCRIBES OF THE CONVENTION.

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1748, Rev. Mather Byles, Boston,	1755
1755, Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, Boston,	1757
1757, Rev. Samuel Cooper, Boston,	1758
1758, Rev. Andrew Eliot, Boston,	1761
1761, Rev. Samuel Mather, Boston,	1762
1762, Rev. Ebenezer Bridge, Chelmsford,	1763
1763, Rev. Ebenezer Parkman, Westborough,	1766
1766, Rev. Amos Adams, Roxbury,	1776
1776, Rev. Jacob Cushing, Waltham,	1779
1779, Rev. John Lathrop, Boston,	1787
1787, Rev. John Clarke, Boston,	1792
1792, Rev. John Bradford, Roxbury,	1794
1794, Rev. Jedidiah Morse, Charlestown,	1800
1800, Rev. John T. Kirkland, Boston,	1810
1810, Rev. John Pierce, Brookline,	1820
1820, Rev. John Codman, Dorchester.	

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*Form of a Bequest or Legacy.*

Item, I give and bequeath the sum of  
to the *Massachusetts Congregational Charitable Society*, in trust,  
to be applied, at their discretion, to the relief and support of the  
widows and children of deceased ministers, and other persons  
mentioned in the Act of Incorporation.













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An historical sketch of the Convention

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